Aryanand

AND THE CROWN OF LIFE

WERNER BANDEL

It sounds like a fairy tale, it reads like one - yet it is none!

Life holds many secrets, its highest though is the quest for the 'Crown of Life'.
Only the truly wise know of this crown and know where to find it.
Aryanand meets such a man of wisdom and sets out to find the crown for himself.

Beautifully illustrated, this book narrates Aryanand's adventurous quest for the secret of life.
He has to pass dangerous tests the closer he gets to the goal. Eventually, his journey ends on top of the 'Mountain of Wisdom' – only to discover that what he has been searching for can be found as his own, unbounded cosmic Self.

Filled with wonder and inspiration, the readers will accompany Aryanand and together with him will explore the magical worlds of their innermost life...

The original German edition of the book was published in 1991 and reissued in 2010. This English edition is prepared by the author himself.

Nehru Bal Pustakalya

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ISBN 978-93-5491-602-1

First Edition 2022 (*Saka* 1944)

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₹ 225.00

Published by the Director, National Book Trust, India
Nehru Bhawan, 5 Institutional Area, Phase-II
Vasant Kunj, New Delhi - 110070

www.nbtindia.gov.in

This fairy-tale
is dedicated to no one
but
Your Self

The first who told Aryanand the tale of the Crown of Life, was a man of wisdom – one of the wandering sages, who, leaving the inaccessible mountains and forests or travelling from far-away countries, once in a while came visiting the bustling cities to spread words of wisdom among the people or to assist a king with their counsel in difficult matters of state.

One day, such a stranger had come to town. Where from? No one could tell. But his arrival caused quite a stir. He was dressed in a long flowing robe, made from such precious material as no one before had ever seen. A silken scarf, interwoven with threads of gold, covered his head and was held in place by a precious gemstone.

The man's face shone with serenity and was framed by a snow-white beard, which only enhanced its dignity further. Most striking however was the gaze of his eyes, which in the colour of heaven radiated infinite calm.

One evening, while roaming the quiet fields outside town, Aryanand happened to meet him. The sage was sitting on top of a hill, under an ancient tree. His eyes were closed and the rays of the setting sun bathed his dignified face in gold-glowing light. Nature seemed to be holding her breath in a deep and timeless silence.

Aryanand stopped. He simply stood there, lost in wonder. After a little while—or had it been an eternity, the sage slowly opened his eyes, and his gaze filled Aryanand's heart with celestial light.

Smiling and with a quiet motion of his hand, the stranger invited Aryanand to sit down and listen. And this was the first time he heard the tale of the Crown of Life.

The wise man laid out his story for Aryanand like a necklace of precious jewels. He spoke quietly, using simple words, and the flow of his speech was calm and enchanting like the murmur of water in fountains and creeks or like the gentle breeze through the crown of an ancient tree.

Whosoever found this crown, he smilingly explained, had all the beauty and all the power of nature at his command. Wind, weather and clouds would surrender to his merest desire, and he would talk to the birds and animals of the forest in their very own language.

Anyone who made this crown their own forever, was blessed by it with wisdom and wealth and never-ending happiness. Ancient legends and traditions all praised those who were known to have found it as the greatest rulers and sages.

Somehow everything the wise man said felt familiar to Aryanand. Happily, he closed his eyes and with each word of the unfolding story he found a mighty flood of long-forgotten memories, arising from his inmost being, coming back to life.

As the sage was about to conclude his tale, Aryanand found the stream of memories gently ebbing away and his happiness expanded into an ocean of bliss. His mind lit up with a light from the depth of his heart and lost itself in an inner awareness which seemed to touch eternity.

Aryanand felt the story the sage had told had been all too short. Like in a pleasant dream, time had passed far too fast but when he slowly opened his eyes, he was amazed to find the silver shield of the moon already afloat in the star studded sky.

To his greatest surprise, however, the sage himself had vanished – disappeared, as though swallowed up by the earth!

But everything around him shone with an unearthly light. Every leaf, every blade of grass pulsated in some tender luminescence, and Aryanand was not sure if the mysterious rays of the moon or if the enchanting words of the sage were permeating everything they had touched.

Lost in thought but full of happiness, Aryanand returned to town. His feet hardly seemed to touch the ground, and the pearls of dew, which in the moonlight sparkled on each blade of grass, hardly seemed to stir under his quiet steps.

In the days that followed, Aryanand hoped to meet this wonderful sage once more. But all his searching was in vain. No one could tell him where he had gone. The guards of the nine old gates of the town had not seen him leave; and none of the merchants Aryanand questioned had sold him any provisions for travel.

The memory of their meeting, however, remained alive in Aryanand's heart. At night, he often saw himself accompanied by the sage, roaming the glowing worlds of his dreams in search of the Crown of Life and each day without this priceless treasure seemed just wasted.

However, since their meeting his life was buoyed and enlivened by a wonderful lightness. A subtle expectation began to inspire his days, and everything he did, everything he learned and every new experience created ever new waves of happiness.

It was strange, how more and more people began telling him of the Crown of Life and all of them had such wonderful things to say. Most people however, whether they had travelled the world or studied with famous teachers, were only too eager to tell him, how hard they thought it was to find this crown; and often mysterious tales were spun around all those who had dared to venture in quest of it.

Many therefore discouraged him and advised that it was better to forget the crown altogether.

However, Aryanand sought the advice of other masters and sages living in mountains and forests visited by a few. They encouraged him and explained how simple and easy it was for anyone to secure this crown; that anyone could find it if only they had an innocent heart and truly wished for it. But where exactly the crown was hidden, was guarded by these hermits as their greatest secret.

All these wondrous tales and legends which, like mysteriously shimmering veils, floated around the Crown of Life, made his wish to find it himself, only grow stronger day by day.

The years flew past, and the tender sprout of desire Aryanand nurtured within his heart in time grew into a mighty tree.

One night the silver rays of the moon shone a little brighter than usual into Aryanand's room. His sleep was light, almost weightless. It felt as if he was restfully floating in the glow of a golden light.

The gates of inner vision swung open, and Aryanand felt himself lifted into the ever greater freedom of a blissful dream:

High above a towering mountain floated the radiant Crown of Life, and a never-ending procession was on its

way to the highest peak. Aryanand recognised himself walking among the crowds of people and together with many other pilgrims, he reached the mountain plateau, right above which circled the crown, sparkling with the fire of countless gems.

Then he saw himself standing alone, the Crown of Life in his hands. All of a sudden he started to grow, becoming taller and taller... The Crown of Life now radiating on his head, bright like the midday sun.

Yet he continued to grow even further, grew high above the stars until, like a mighty column of light, he reached through the entire universe; and ablaze in the dazzling light of the crown, all the stars in heaven lit up like giant jewels of fire.

In his hand, Aryanand held a burning torch, which he had lit from the light of the crown and now began to whirl in a circle until it turned into a wheel of fire. Countless sparks and little flames flew out and away from the whizzing torch, falling as ever-new stars, ever-new planets and ever-new worlds into the infinite depth of the heavens. The self-luminous space was filled with the sound of a fiery rain, which rose up like the roaring surf of the ocean. Wave after wave came rolling closer and seemed to break on the shores of eternity. Aryanand continued to grow... The light of the crown became brighter still. The wheel of fire he had created now circled inside his heart, and like specs of dust in a shaft of sunlight, the countless worlds of the unbounded universe were dancing their cosmic merry-go-round within the space of his heart. Infinite power and infinite bliss were holding each other in balance – and he only wished this to be, not a dream, but a tangible reality. Early next morning Aryanand awoke wonderfully refreshed, and the images of his dream faded like the ribbon of the rainbow. But his desire to find the Crown of Life had ripened to an unshakable determination. Even before the sun had rolled its golden wheel above the horizon, Aryanand left the walls and narrow lanes of the town far behind. He was walking along the banks of a creek towards a forest of ancient trees. Where the hermitage of a well-known master was hidden.

The meadows were moist with dew. Flowers still kept their petals tenderly closed, awaiting the first rays of the sun, which would lift the veil of fog that the night had spread across the valley. The crooked alders and willows along the creek seemed to hover above the white morning mist and made Aryanand think of goblins and other wondrous creatures he knew from ancient fairy tales and legends.

All of nature was as if under some magic spell – afloat between the radiance of the night and the ethereal glow of dawn.

Soon, Aryanand had crossed the valley. Following a hidden path, he wandered through the cool and heaven-reaching halls of the forest until he approached the edge of a clearing.

Beneath the low branches of a tree, he found the hermit waiting to meet him and for the wink of an eyelid Aryanand could have sworn that, just for a moment, he looked exactly like the stranger, the one who had been the first to tell him the tale of the Crown of Life.

This wise man had once been the teacher of Aryanand's father. His beard was white and his hair, held in place by a wreath of mistletoe, lay on his shoulders like silver.

Aryanand bowed to greet him, and before he could say a word, the wise man smiled and started to speak:

"My son, I knew, you would come here today and I also know why.

Many secrets of nature you already have discovered, but now you want to set out in quest of the Crown of Life. In all the worlds there is no treasure more precious than the Crown of Life, and with greatest pleasure I will help you to find it safely and soon."

He led Aryanand to an old bench of rock overgrown with moss and tendrils of ivy. There was the quiet murmur of a spring; and here, in the shade of a towering tree, he shared with Aryanand his greatest secret. He described to him the way to the crown, the same way the masters of an ancient tradition had already guided his ancestors: "There is a rock, as old as mankind. It is known as the Mountain of Wisdom, and there, high on its shining peak, you will find the crown you are looking for!"

For a while, master and student sat together in silence.

Then the sage rose and motioning Aryanand to remain seated, disappeared into his simple cottage.

A few moments later he returned carrying some sort of a bundle.

This small bundle was so strangely wrapped and artfully knotted into its wrappings, that it seemed quite unlikely that anyone would ever discover how it might open. In fact, one could not even be sure, which side was up and which was down. "This," Aryanand's master explained, "is the bequest of your father. It was left in my custody for the day which would mark the beginning of your quest for the crown. Nobody is able to open this bundle. Neither cunning nor force will reveal its secret. However, when the time is ripe, it shall open up by itself."

With these wondrous words, which to Aryanand sounded very peculiar, his teacher handed him the mysterious bundle: "Keep it safe and take good care of it! Even if sometimes it may feel like a burden, on your journey it will prove to be useful."

Early next morning Aryanand bade his master farewell, but it was not easy to leave. With an encouraging nod, however, the smiling sage indicated the direction to take, and Aryanand set out on his way.

Hours went by as he followed the path his master had pointed out. He felt no hunger, he felt no thirst, and as the fading light of the day heralded the time of dusk, he was as fresh as on the outset of his lonesome hike. However, as advised by his teacher, he now sat down to take some rest.

Reclining against his bundle, he closed his eyes for a while – and the world around him dissolved in the golden glow of his inner light.

Beautifully refreshed, as if emerging from a long and pleasant slumber, he resumed his solitary journey.

He walked all night without feeling tired. Also, the following day and night passed in no time at all; and no matter if the sun, the moon or the stars stood in the sky, Aryanand continued walking ahead without losing his way.

He found indications that many had walked this trail before him. But now he seemed to be the first and only wanderer since long and not even once did he meet another human being.

Towards the end of the third day, however, the forest started to clear, and Aryanand stepped into the open: Ahead of him the landscape sloped down into a beautiful valley which, in the light of the setting sun, seemed to extend to infinity.

Above the horizon, however, rose a towering mountain – almost transparent, as if made of glass.

Its peak disappeared in a wreath of clouds and it seemed to rise high into the heavens.

A few hours later, Aryanand stood at the foot of this mountain. The gentle light of the moon now illumined its crystal pinnacles, which shone like the towers and bays of an impregnable fortification and reflected the light of the stars like glistening gemstones.

However, the path Aryanand followed now became barely discernable. So he decided to rest for the remainder of the night and begin the ascent in the light of the morning sun.

The next day, Aryanand set out early, and his way quickly led him higher and higher. At a spot where the trail ran steeply between towering walls of rock, he heard a noise like the rumble of thunder between the clouds, at first from a distance but then fast approaching.

Suddenly, the earth started to tremble, and the rocks around him started to shake. Anxiously, Aryanand peeped around the corner ahead and gasped when he saw the strange being which came there to meet him.

A huge figure lumbered along the narrow trail. This giant had grown from one rough piece of rock and with each of its rumbling steps swayed close to the verge of falling. Now it stopped right in front of him, blocking his path.

The colossus then started to speak, s-l-o-w-l-y, its voice like the sound of a crumbling mountain, so loud, Aryanand pressed his hands over his ears.

"Well, well, young lad, where are you heading?" Thundered the rocky giant. Aryanand swallowed.

"You don't seem very pleased to see me!" the giant continued his greetings.

This encounter was certainly far from what could have been called a pleasure, and Aryanand dared not open his mouth.

"Do I see the tip of your nose turning white already? What will happen if you climb higher, where the air is thinner still? Besides, with a bundle like the one you carry, no one has passed me by! Come on little fellow,

let me have it!"

The giant tried to grab the parcel Aryanand held in his arms. But he had already recovered from the first shock of this encounter and swiftly jumped aside, hitting the giant's clumsy fingers.

"Ha", the colossus rumbled, "would you like to play?

So be it! But before we begin, give me this bundle!"

And again he tried to snatch it.

But Aryanand kept holding it tightly, and even as the giant lifted him and his bundle up in the air, he kept hitting his hand.

"Stop tickling me!" roared the colossus with laughter and dropped him back to the ground.

He would never be able to continue his journey, Aryanand realized, as long as this rocky monster stood blocking his path, and so he tried to fight his way through. But the giant only grew bigger and bigger every time he got hit. Only due to his swiftness did Aryanand escape being caught.

Now the dull-witted colossus no longer seemed to enjoy 'playing' around. He raised his arm in a final threat:

"For the last time, let me have this bundle!" he roared – so loud, the entire mountain started shaking below their feet, and with boulder-like impact his fist crashed down at the very spot where Aryanand had been standing only a second ago.

That very instant, a precious reminder flashed across Aryanand's troubled mind: "Noise only increases," his master once said, "if you try to calm down an unsettled

crowd by shouting even louder than they. And a fight only gets worse, if you also start fighting, even if your intention may be to separate the rivals. In such situations it is wise to act in a different way."

And his master had made it clear, that he should never and under any circumstances get himself involved in a quarrel while on his quest for the crown. All dangers and adverse situations on his solitary journey would vanish if inwardly he managed to become completely quiet and calm – even to such an extent, that outwardly he seemed not to breathe. His surroundings would instantaneously fall into a deep magic slumber, and no one, nothing at all would continue to trouble him.

To accomplish this feat, his master had taught him a simple but secret art, which had been handed down through the ages by a cherished tradition of sages.

All this crossed Aryanand's mind like lightning. Swiftly, he jumped away from the giant, sat down, closed his eyes and fearlessly started to practise this art as he had been taught by his teacher.

Just a few simple instructions he had to remember, and immediately his thoughts started to reorganise without effort and settle swiftly. At the same time, and all by itself, his breathing had become ever so gentle, bringing about a radiant state of deep restful alertness.

The giant was so puzzled by the unexpected behaviour of his human adversary that he almost forgot to breathe himself. He started to yawn, felt dizzy, began to sway to and fro and the very last fleeting impression Aryanand caught, as his most subtle thought vanished like a minute ripple was, that the giant, huge like an age old house, started to crumble and with a deafening noise, collapsed right over him.

Tons and tons of heavy boulders rolled off Aryanand's shoulders. Then there was silence – and he felt indescribably light.

Slowly, he opened his eyes to get a glimpse of what had happened, expecting of course to be sitting amidst clouds of dust and heaps of rubble.

However, to his greatest surprise, he found himself in the hall of the most beautiful golden palace. Next to him lay his bundle. Its outer cloth had been torn to pieces, revealing a small box built from wood.

Although its lid had neither lock nor bolt, Aryanand was not able to lift it. Without worrying too much about this, he just took the chest under his arm and started to explore the palace.

The walls and pillars of the spacious hall in which he found himself were entirely made of gold and decorated with shimmering jewels. Above him arched a magnificent dome, and shafts of sunlight filtered through its coloured glass. The heavy gold and jewel-studded doors of fragrant sandalwood silently opened as if moved by invisible hands, even as Aryanand only felt the desire to enter the adjoining room.

He spent all day exploring the palace and every new wonder was revealed to his eyes. In the evening, he entered a hall, where a sumptuous table was laid, with delicacies fit for a king. And since everything in this palace seemed to be for no one but him alone, he dined to his heart's content.

In one of the adjoining rooms, he found a bed and under its beautiful canopy he spent the night in royal splendor.

Aryanand could have roamed the palace for many days without getting tired. Room after room opened before him. But then he remembered his master's words, not to waste any time on his way to finding the crown.

So, he decided to leave the palace, although he enjoyed every moment of exploring it. He approached one of the nine golden gates he had found on the outer wall. Magic hands opened its heavy doors, and with a hardly discernible thud they locked again behind his heels.

Only a few steps beyond, however, right in the middle of his breathtakingly narrow track across the rocks, grew a gigantic tree. Its trunk alone was so mighty that it completely blocked the path.

There was no way around. So Aryanand decided to climb it, hoping that perhaps higher up there might be a chance to return to the mountain.

However, as he approached the tree, a door he had not noticed in its trunk swung open; out stepped a wild-looking warrior. Resting his arms on a mighty axe, he looked Aryanand up and down, without saying a word. Then he grinned and started to speak: " I've been waiting for you! But it might have been better, you'd never left your golden palace. For if you intend to climb this tree, you will have to part with that box you carry and hand it over to me!"

But the legacy of his father which had been entrusted to him by his master, was too precious to just give away to some stranger! When the guard of the tree found Aryanand ready to hold his ground, he continued:

"I can see your determination is firm, and this in itself is laudable. But I'll put a riddle before you. Solve it – and you may climb this tree, fail - means the end of your journey!"

And the warrior asked Aryanand to tell him exactly how many branches, twigs and leaves, buds, blossoms and fruits might be found on this tree, which was towering above them.

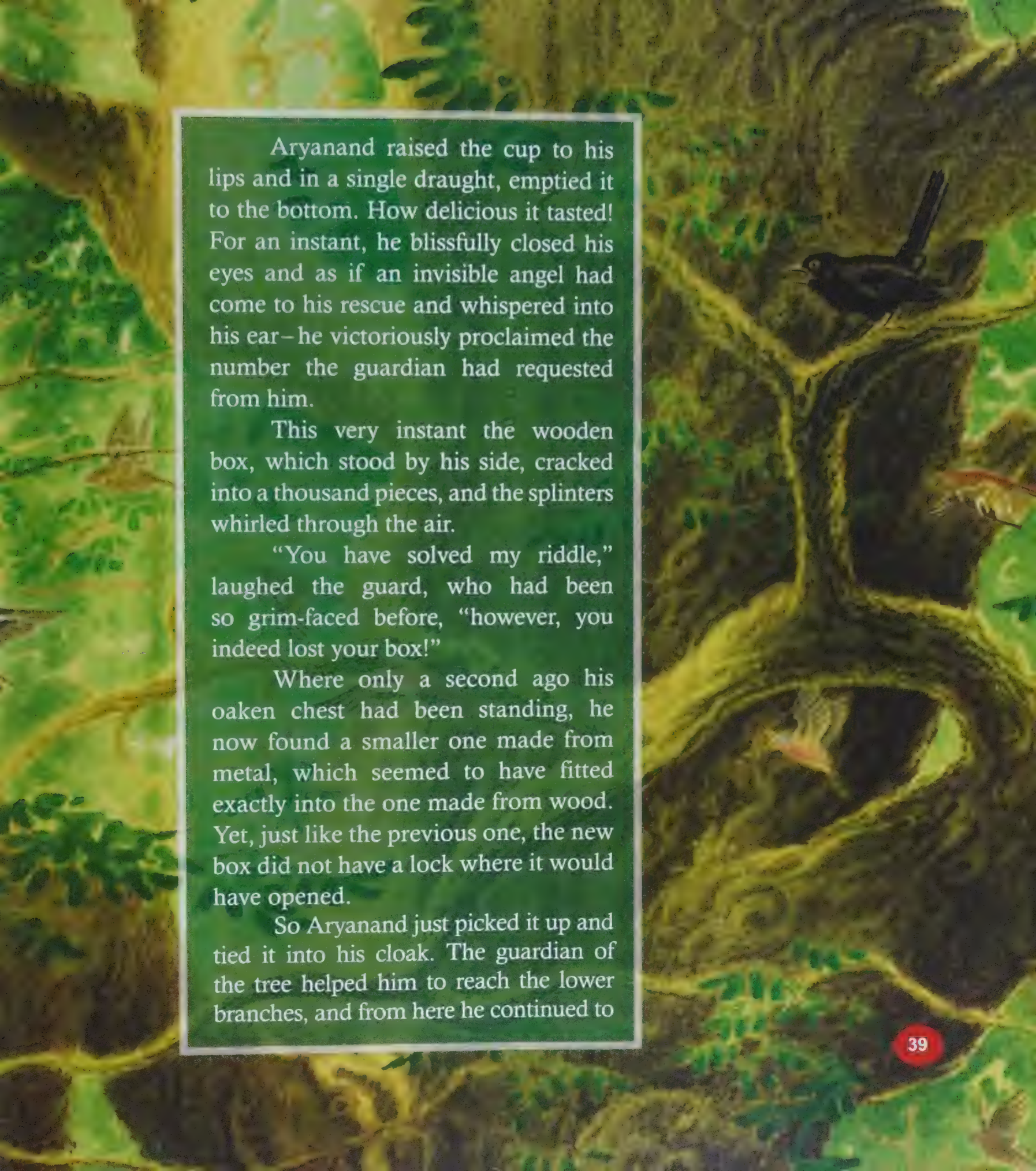
Aryanand hardly dared raise his glance. The tree's giant crown branched as far and wide as the eyes could see. The tangle of twigs and branches was just beyond imagination. It simply seemed impossible to know or even guess the number.

There, like out of a faint white mist, he remembered: Many years ago his master once had shown him a rose, then had explained how its sap, though invisible, nonetheless permeated the the entire rosebush. Without this invisible sap there would indeed not be any flower at all, and everything and every little bit of it: stem, blossoms, leaves, yes, even its thorns were simply nothing but pure, colorless sap.

Now, standing here under this mighty tree, Aryanand suddenly knew: it could not be any different! He only had to ask the sap, which ran through its each and every fiber, to know all one could ever possibly know about this mystery tree. This was the way to solve the warrior's riddle!

"Please, give me a sip of the sap of this tree," he asked the grim-faced guard, "and I shall tell you the number you wish to hear!"

Your request shall be granted," chuckled the warrior and with one whizzing stroke of his axe, cut a notch into the mighty trunk. Immediately, sap started to flow, which he collected in a cup of silver. With a curious look in his eyes, he handed the drink to Aryanand.



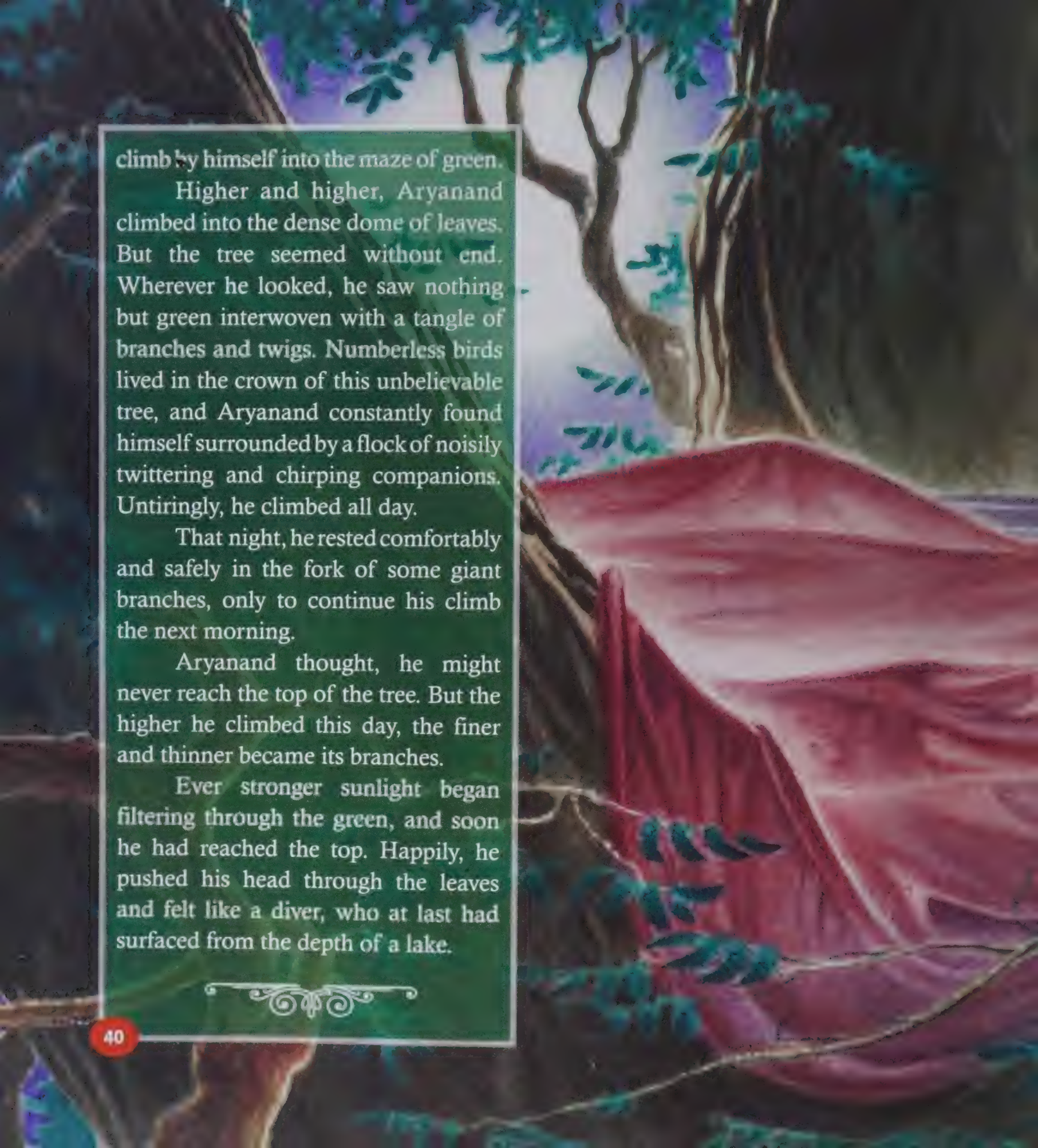
Aryanand raised the cup to his lips and in a single draught, emptied it to the bottom. How delicious it tasted! For an instant, he blissfully closed his eyes and as if an invisible angel had come to his rescue and whispered into his ear – he victoriously proclaimed the number the guardian had requested from him.

This very instant the wooden box, which stood by his side, cracked into a thousand pieces, and the splinters whirled through the air.

"You have solved my riddle," laughed the guard, who had been so grim-faced before, "however, you indeed lost your box!"

Where only a second ago his oaken chest had been standing, he now found a smaller one made from metal, which seemed to have fitted exactly into the one made from wood. Yet, just like the previous one, the new box did not have a lock where it would have opened.

So Aryanand just picked it up and tied it into his cloak. The guardian of the tree helped him to reach the lower branches, and from here he continued to



climb by himself into the maze of green.

Higher and higher, Aryanand climbed into the dense dome of leaves. But the tree seemed without end. Wherever he looked, he saw nothing but green interwoven with a tangle of branches and twigs. Numberless birds lived in the crown of this unbelievable tree, and Aryanand constantly found himself surrounded by a flock of noisily twittering and chirping companions. Untiringly, he climbed all day.

That night, he rested comfortably and safely in the fork of some giant branches, only to continue his climb the next morning.

Aryanand thought, he might never reach the top of the tree. But the higher he climbed this day, the finer and thinner became its branches.

Ever stronger sunlight began filtering through the green, and soon he had reached the top. Happily, he pushed his head through the leaves and felt like a diver, who at last had surfaced from the depth of a lake.

A fresh breeze gently rocked him to and fro. Radiant sunlight sparkled on the ocean of green, which spread as far and wide as the eyes could see; and when the wind blew through the leaves and playfully turned them over, they looked indeed like rippling water.

Just when Aryanand pondered how to continue, he noticed a flicker of light high up in the clouds. It swiftly

travelled in his direction, and soon he recognised five lustrous horses, harnessed to a magnificent chariot.

A richly adorned charioteer playfully held the reins in his hands and seemed to be guiding the horses just with his gaze. He steered the chariot into a curve and stopped right in front of Aryanand.

"What next?" asked the charioteer with a smile, but not waiting for Aryanand's answer, invited him with a friendly gesture to climb into the carriage. "From here on, only these horses can carry you further and bring you closer to your goal."

Aryanand did not need much convincing. Obviously there was no other means to take him away from this place. Grateful for this invitation, he lifted his box into the carriage.

"But this, you will have to leave me as fare", the charioteer spoke as he saw the chest.

"With a box made of iron, no one has yet reached where you want to reach!"

Aryanand felt uneasy. By no means would he give away his box! However, he remained silent, keeping his feelings to himself. Secretly though he had already thought of a plan to possibly outwit the charioteer once they had reached their goal.

But the very instant Aryanand set his foot on the platform, the charioteer vanished into thin air. And as if hit by the slash of an invisible whip, the horses bounced and started to bolt! He just had time to hold on to the side when they whisked off the fragile carriage at a breakneck speed.

Desperately, Aryanand tried to get the horses back under control. But the more he tried, the wilder the chase. No matter how hard he pulled the reins, he was not able to tame the careening horses. Besides, it took all his skill and attention not to be thrown out of the carriage, which now, completely beyond his control, was on the verge of toppling over.

The wild ride led right into a towering mountain of clouds. Shreds of fog flew aside from the furiously neighing horses.

Suddenly, Aryanand noticed that the wheels were again clattering over rock. But the flicker of hope that flared was extinguished the instant he realised that his chariot was actually racing downhill. He was left at the mercy of the frightened horses and whenever his rattling carriage was tossed into the air, it felt like it would break apart any second.

Among all the thoughts which raced through his mind during this hurricane-ride, Aryanand all of a sudden remembered, how his master had once explained a truth by using a simple analogy:

"Even the wildest horse, if it breaks lose, will only run to where it feels safe. But nowhere else does it feel as safe and nowhere else as secure as in that stable, which is its home."

"Therefore," Aryanand thought, "my horses will joyfully run where they come from. They will find their home all by themselves and this will be the end of our neck-breaking ride."

This thought brought back a little of his balance and calm; and just as if the golden reins transmitted his state of mind onto the horses, they too started to settle down and began reducing their speed.

Collecting all his five senses, Aryanand gradually managed to turn them and reverse the chariot's direction. As the horses started to sense his intention, they allowed him to guide them without any strain. And just as if smelling their stable already, they joyfully neighed and galloped uphill.

Aryanand was deeply happy to have survived this dangerous chase. What a joy, to feel the breeze of the ride touch and cool his face for a moment! For just one second he closed his eyes.

This instant his box cracked into pieces and its fragments fell tinkering on the trail behind. A casket of copper, iridescent in all possible colors, stood there, where only a moment ago his iron box had been standing.

Now the ride became pure bliss! Without any real need for guidance the horses galloped in absolute harmony. As if across clouds, without any rattle or jolts, the chariot rolled over the rocks.

Aryanand's wish seemed enough to steer it. He felt like the master charioteer; and although he had lost his iron box as if it had indeed been the fare for this ride, he had won a new one of gleaming, polished copper instead.

The horses raced late into the night without showing any sign of fatigue; and under the light of the moon and the stars, Aryanand and his chariot arrived at a peaceful castle.

On entering its beautiful courtyard, the harness slipped off the horses' heads and shoulders, and they trotted into the garden to graze and drink from the well.

The wild chase had left him rather exhausted, and right there in the courtyard, on the chariot's platform, Aryanand fell into a deep, dreamless sleep full of light. He slept until the rising sun woke him. Since time was precious on his journey, he

re-harnessed the horses without delay, stepped onto the chariot, guided it out of the gate and continued his ride.

Rested and cheerful, his team of five trotted uphill, and soon Aryanand reached a spot where he found the trail, narrow and almost level, running all around the mountain. Just when he steered the chariot into a curve, the horses suddenly shied and snorting anxiously, refused to go even one step further. The reason for their fear became evident when, from behind a rock, a man appeared whom one might have expected to meet at the ocean but most certainly not on a mountain-trail.

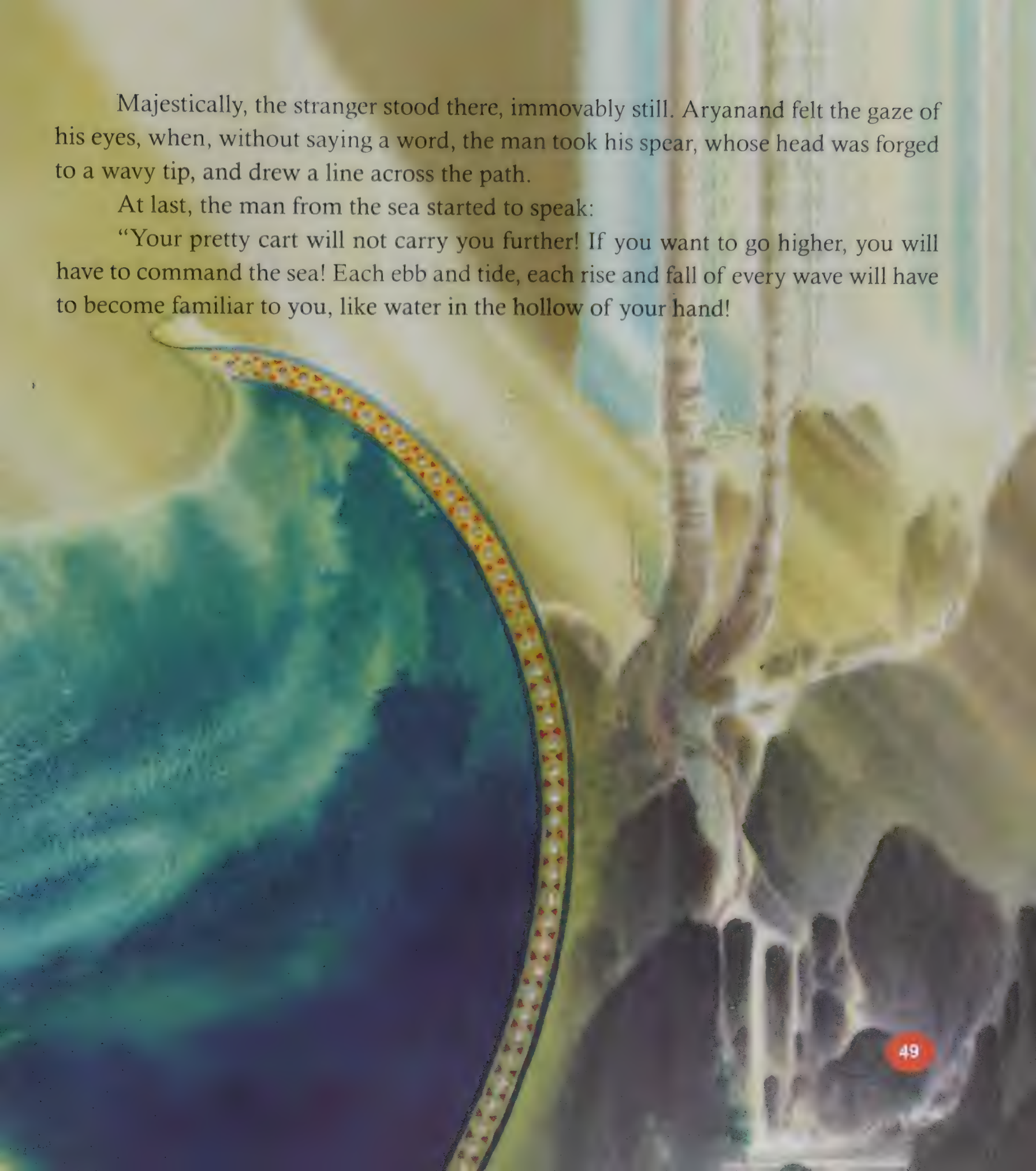
The stranger was tall and crowned with a wreath of red coral. He was clad in an ocean green cloak, its hem ornamented with lustrous pearls; and when a gust of wind bulged his cloak, it looked as if the man stood in the midst of a wave, with the pearls rising around him like tiny, glittering bubbles of air.

All his garments were artfully embroidered with scintillating mother of pearl and precious stones from the sea. His blue and gold gleaming hair flowed over his back like a wave, and his long beard looked like sea-grass floating in water.

Majestically, the stranger stood there, immovably still. Aryanand felt the gaze of his eyes, when, without saying a word, the man took his spear, whose head was forged to a wavy tip, and drew a line across the path.

At last, the man from the sea started to speak:

"Your pretty cart will not carry you further! If you want to go higher, you will have to command the sea! Each ebb and tide, each rise and fall of every wave will have to become familiar to you, like water in the hollow of your hand!



If you give me that chest of copper I see there on your carriage, I will teach you to understand the play of the ocean and will safely guide you across. For you see, no one has ever crossed the ocean while carrying a copper chest!"

Fear, however, was something Aryanand had long left behind on his journey. Besides, why worry about the ocean when right now he stood high on a mountain trail. This he tried to explain to the man.

Also, that he did not consider it fair to frighten peaceloving travellers with such unreasonable threats, and never, ever would he part with his box!

The ocean-green man smiled and replied: "I don't have the time to give sermons. I only came to offer my help.

However, if you don't want it, keep holding on to your box! There is nothing more I can do." These were his final words, and right in front of Aryanand's eyes, he vanished as if swallowed up by the mountain.

There was the deafening crack of thunder and, as if the single blow of an axe had cut all the mountains of clouds to pieces, torrents of rain started gushing from heaven like the final deluge.

But not only from above the waters came pouring, they also burst right out of the mountain itself. Masses and masses of water suddenly gushed from every crevice and gargled from underneath every rock.

Aryanand's horses started to panic. They ripped the reins out of his hands. The chariot started to tilt. Aryanand just managed to grab his box, was thrown into the water and in no time at all, found himself adrift between mountain-high waves in the midst of an ocean.

Left at the mercy of this violent storm, Aryanand remembered the words of the merman: His horses would never be able to carry him across the sea. Besides, he would only be ready to master this challenge, if he knew all one could possibly know about all its currents and waves.

But how, in his present dilemma, could he possibly have power over the waves and truly know the ocean? How, with ever new waves ceaselessly rising, falling and disappearing in the ocean's unfathomable unboundedness?

He wished he could be back on his mountain to once more speak to the man who had wanted to teach him the art of mastering the waves.

Aryanand felt as much at a loss as during one pitch black night when his master had asked him to drive the darkness out of the room, so they could see each other again.

His master's peculiar request had first caught him by surprise. But then it had made him see how sometimes a difficult situation can only be solved by a new and completely different approach, without which, stumbling in the dark, one tries in vain to drive it away.

Just as darkness cannot be pushed out of a window but vanishes all by itself as soon as a single light is lit, so hopeless was his present state of getting to know the entire ocean by swimming and struggling amidst its billowing waves! But would he ever discover the secret how, from the depth of the ocean, a single wave rises, how it unfolds and how – without leaving a trace – it again dissolves in the very unboundedness whence it arose?

There was only one way to solve this riddle, and Aryanand decided to act. He closed his eyes. Using the beautiful, simple technique which his master had taught him, he soon became so serene, settled and calm that – without having to strain, and even before he knew how it happened – his breath became finer, finer, finer... and faded.

However, just as during his fight with the giant, a gentle, hardly discernible flow of breath kept him fully awake, his mind crystal clear and pulsating with life.

This moment, he felt as if all the waters of all seven seas, of all the rivers and lakes of the world were streaming together inside his heart to merge into one unbounded ocean of silence.

Now he let go – thought of nothing – let himself sink. Like a stone thrown into the sea, he reached the bottom without any effort and from here he looked up to the surface above.

This one glance would solve the task the merman had put before him: what on the surface of the ocean just seemed an incomprehensible chaos, was, seen from here, from the calm of its depth, a beautiful, delicately flowing display of water, colours and light.

No sooner had he seen this wonderful spectacle overhead when, without a sound, the box of copper he still held in his hands slipped to the ground and fell into pieces.

At his feet now lay a cask of pure shining silver, which had been hidden inside all the time. But just like all the previous others, this silver chest too had no point where it would open.

As Aryanand looked around, he saw the man he had last met on the mountain approaching him on the ocean floor. A shoal of fish merrily danced around him, and playfully, as if just for the fun of it, he stirred the quiet waters with his spear. The faint and hardly discernible ripples created by this simple motion swelled into tumultuous waves the higher they rose to the surface above.

Filled with wonder, Aryanand watched the countless sparkling bubbles of air which, like streams of his very own thoughts, were rising in glittering, unbroken chains all around him.

"Now you have uncovered the mystery of the waves, for you have seen the depth of the sea!" spoke the ocean-man, laughing heartily.

"But your box of copper you had to sacrifice here on the floor nonetheless. However, since you successfully passed my test, it will be my pleasure to place you back onto your mountain trail. In fact, you have never actually left it!"

Aryanand too started to laugh, for he enjoyed watching the play of the waves high above. It was indeed a feast for the eyes to observe the constantly changing mosaic of sunlight broken up into rainbow colors which, guided by invisible laws, constantly floated apart and together again, creating ever new wonderful patterns like in a giant kaleidoscope.

Then he felt a tender current carrying him up and away. And, before he knew how it happened, a wave placed him down on a rocky cliff. The ocean disappeared right in front of his eyes as if it had never existed; and Aryanand found himself sitting above a sea of gleaming white clouds, not far from the well-known mountain trail, which he had been forced to leave so very much against his will.

With the silver casket under his arm, Aryanand continued ascending the mountain. Marching on for a while, he noticed that rocks and plants along his path became more and more translucent and sparkling.

After hours, he eventually reached a valley in which everything was of pure flawless crystal. The grass, the flowers, trees and rocks, even the beetles and butterflies he saw, everything was of the finest crystal – and the sun sparkled in it with twinkling reflections. The entire region seemed to be under the spell of some hidden magician. Not the faintest breeze stirred the air, and deep silence hung over the valley like an invisible crystal dome.

A few steps further, Aryanand's journey came to a halt on the glittering shore of a lake, the waters of which covered the entire floor of the valley. Calm, clear and radiant it lay at his feet. Not the slightest ripple disturbed its surface, and its immaculate mirror reflected the sky and the entire valley down to the most tiny sparkling pebble.

Not very far from where Aryanand stood, grew tall and gleaming trees of crystal. Their diamond-leaves reflected the sunlight in countless dazzling sparks of color. Shining walls of polished diamond towered all around the valley, not even leaving a footpath which could have led him around the lake. On the opposite shore, however, he noticed another group of glistening trees. That seemed to mark the exit from the valley.

To cross the lake he would have to swim. There was no other way out of this valley. But no sooner had he set his foot into the water did he jump back in surprise: it felt colder than ice!

A wave travelled across the crystal-lake towards the other shore; and a few moments later, a radiant figure came walking over the water, just as if the ripple Aryanand had created, had reached out to call him.

Like everything else in this valley, the man who approached him shone like a jewel. He had long, golden-shimmering hair and was dressed in a cloak fashioned of floating crystal. His right hand gracefully held a gleaming sword, its narrow blade cut from a single diamond.

He stepped from the lake onto the shore, and it was not until then that Aryanand noticed that the water under the feet of this man had not stirred in the least.

The man with the blazing sword addressed Aryanand in a friendly tone:

"I'm glad, you have already come such a long way on this mountain. But to cross this lake you need greater skills than those you have acquired so far. There is no way around this lake and no way to swim across. But with your very own eyes you just saw that one can walk over it's waters!

Like everyone else who came here before you, I will gladly lead you across, if you just bring one of those trees with you."

With his sword he pointed towards some crystal trees growing nearby.

"Besides, if you intend to continue your journey, you'll have to leave your casket of silver behind in this valley!"

In vain, Aryanand tried to convince the man, that he could not part with his father's legacy. But the guardian of the lake remained unmoved.

Once more he asked Aryanand to simply just fetch a tree and follow him across the water.

On the other shore there would still be time to find some agreement about the box. These were his final words.

Then he turned, stepped onto the water and with sure strides, looking back not once, walked across the mirror-surface of the lake towards its distant shore.

A completely perplexed Aryanand found himself left behind on the beach. The master of the valley had made two seemingly impossible demands. The third, to leave the silver box in the hands of a stranger, he did not even dare consider.

Sitting at the shore, his eyes wandered back and forth between the still and shiny waters of the lake and the radiant diamond trees. How should he ever be able to lift and hold such a giant tree in his hands, let alone carry it across the lake without immediately sinking?

His thoughts travelled back to the happy times he had spent with his master.

One day, while standing in the shade of a tree, his master had asked him to pluck a fruit from one of the lower branches, then he opened the fruit and in return gave him one of the many kernels, which were inside.

Then he asked him to carefully open this kernel.

"What do you see?"

"Nothing!" had been Aryanand's answer, "there is nothing to see! The seed is plain empty!" And when he had told his master, they both had a laugh.

But then the wise man lifted the veil, which was hiding the mystery before him. He had made him see that reality, which lay beneath the surface appearance of everything.

How from this "nothingness" of each and every single one of those tiny seeds, in each and every single one of those fruits, which grew on the branches above them, sometimes a towering tree would sprout – just as mighty as the one in the shadow of which they just stood.

Full of wonder, Aryanand had looked at the tiny seed in his hand and – in a twinkle – he really had seen the giant tree, which still lay dormant and hidden in the 'emptiness' of this seed.

As soon as these memories flashed through his mind, Aryanand, now sitting on the shore of the mirror lake, picked up one of the crystal-seeds, which had fallen from the tree by the thousands.

Like a glistening dewdrop, it sparkled on the palm of his hand. Yet, like through a magic glass, he saw in it the mighty tree, perfect with all its branches, blossoms, leaves and fruit, which someday would be sprouting from it.

In his first impulse of joy at holding an entire tree in his hands by holding a tiny jewel, he jumped onto the lake without second thought. And not the faintest ripple stirred its surface!

Unbelieving and surprised, Aryanand stopped and looked down at the water. For a moment he was not sure, that what he saw was his mirror reflection or if he was this reflection himself. He felt dizzy, perplexed and perturbed.

That very instant, a minute ripple spread from where he was standing and started to travel across the lake.

Aryanand just had the time to jump back to the shore before sinking into the icy water.

Yet he had also realised why at first the water had been calm but then had stirred all of a sudden. Now Aryanand knew that the lake would be as calm and quiet as he felt calm and quiet inside; and the water would stir if he felt restless and shaky. The faintest impulse of his thinking and feeling was instantaneously transmitted onto the surface of the lake!

But did he not know the secret to calm the most violent storm in his mind?

And so he sat down, closed his eyes and practised the very same art which had already saved him during his fight with the giant and afterwards on the ocean.

Just when the faintest thought in his head merged with a brilliant light from inside, his chest of silver shattered into sparkling pieces.

When Aryanand slowly opened his eyes, he found a casket of gold beside him and again he tried in vain to lift its lid although it seemed to have no lock.

In his mind and his heart, Aryanand now felt as serene, as crystal-clear and unperturbed as the shining lake which lay at his feet.

He picked up his box and, as if this was the most natural thing in the world, stepped onto the water and silently walked towards the opposite shore.

There the crystal-clad man came to meet him and smiled when he noticed the golden casket Aryanand carried under his arm; and when he told him of his adventure and showed him the sparkling crystal seed, he smiled again.

"From today on you may always carry a diamond tree in memory of this valley," he laughed at the end of Aryanand's story and let him keep the seed as a gift.

Then the master of the crystal valley showed Aryanand how to proceed and bade him farewell. From here onward, all that remained of his trail was a path cut into solid rock and winding in ever tighter curves higher up the mountain.

The world up here was bathed in the blue glimmering light of the cloudless sky, and the higher Aryanand climbed, the more mountain and sky seemed to merge in colour and transparency.

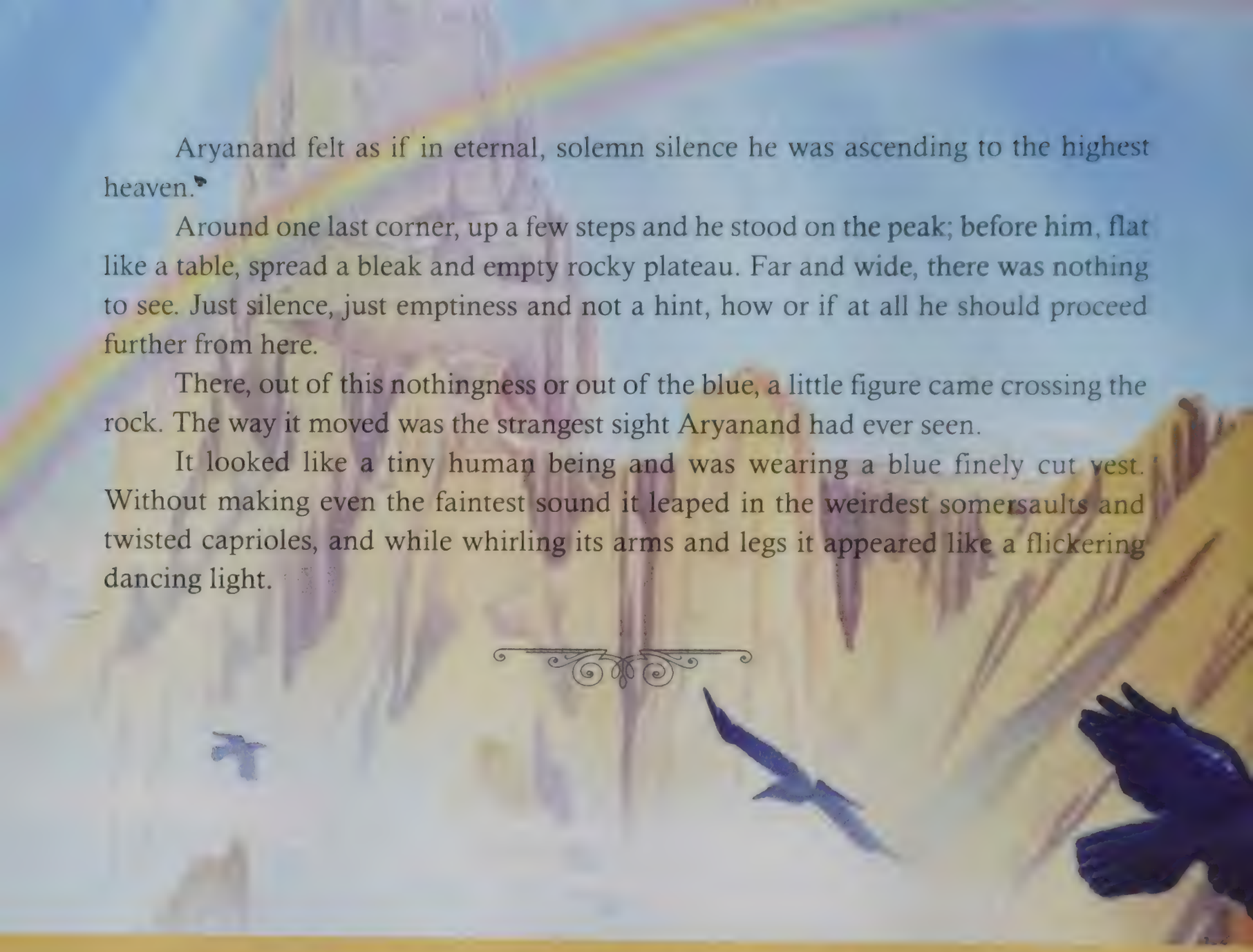
Not a whisper could be heard, and even the sound of his footsteps was immediately swallowed up by the rocks and the air.

Aryanand felt as if in eternal, solemn silence he was ascending to the highest heaven.

Around one last corner, up a few steps and he stood on the peak; before him, flat like a table, spread a bleak and empty rocky plateau. Far and wide, there was nothing to see. Just silence, just emptiness and not a hint, how or if at all he should proceed further from here.

There, out of this nothingness or out of the blue, a little figure came crossing the rock. The way it moved was the strangest sight Aryanand had ever seen.

It looked like a tiny human being and was wearing a blue finely cut vest. Without making even the faintest sound it leaped in the weirdest somersaults and twisted caprioles, and while whirling its arms and legs it appeared like a flickering dancing light.



With each somersault the strange little fellow seemed to try and jump over himself and with a wild and whizzing loop he landed right in front of Aryanand's feet – laughing with a quiet jingle:

"Welcome to the peak of the Mountain of Wisdom!" the blue goblin greeted him in that same jingling voice. "I know why you have come – like everyone else since time immemorial. But I am sure, this is not what you expected. Maybe somebody else

has already snatched the crown you are searching for!"

The dwarf's voice changed to a teasing tone. "Anyway, first you should hand me the box you brought! This is my territory and my domain, and you're standing on it without asking prior permission. Has anyone called you or why are you here? Just give me your box and I will let you in on the secret this mountain peak may have in store for you!"

This seemed a very uncertain bargain! Aryanand sat down on his box to make the point that he was not willing to give it away.

The dwarf just giggled and with a ringing laughter, vaulted over the edge of the cliff and was gone!

But a second later he came jumping up and down again from just the opposite direction.

"Way down in the valley," he continued his teasing,

"I have seen the Crown of Life. You could have saved yourself a lot of trouble. Not everything is lost though! Let me tell you how you can still find it: You will only win the Crown of Life if you succeed to jump over your shadow!

I have just shown you how that's to be done. All the way down to the foot of the mountain, you have to jump once again. Your shadow will not dare to follow you over the edge of the cliff!

Take courage and give it a try!"

These were the last words the strange dwarf spoke, then he leaped as if shot up by a spring, jumped into the air and disappeared over the cliff, leaving Aryanand behind with the haunting echo of his ringing laughter.

Stuck to the edge of the cliff, however, was a small dark spot on the rock–the tiny shadow of the dwarf.

All this seemed so very unreal! But Aryanand had talked to the dwarf, had he not?

Had he not witnessed with his very own eyes the dwarf's peculiar display of somersaults and twisted loops? He calmly started to ponder his encounter with this shadow-jumper once more.

Time slipped away and evening fell, but all remained a mystery, and Aryanand was not one step closer to a reasonable solution.

He pondered and pondered and over his pondering, fell into a pleasant sleep with a most wonderful dream: In the company of his master he sat on a flowering meadow, which sloped down to a beautiful valley at the edge of a forest.

The words of wisdom his master spoke opened his heart and made his mind wide, light and free. Like a radiant, golden eagle, his thoughts soared higher and higher into unbounded spheres.

There, in a wink, the shadow of a large bird passed over them, and Aryanand looked up to the sky. Indeed, right overhead hovered a majestic eagle, gleaming like gold.

The very instant Aryanand saw it, he became this golden eagle himself and in ever wider circles, climbed freely into the blue radiant ether.

Thus, he soared high above himself into the light of the infinite sky and yet he also remained, sitting below himself, like a shadow, down on the earth.

With the keen vision of the eagle he saw the whole world in bird's-eye-view, all at once, yet clear and distinct in its most minute detail. But there was so much light from inside the eagle's eye that everything outside felt like a shadow.

Then again, he witnessed himself sitting below himself amidst the flowers at the edge of the forest. He was here, at the same time he was there, as the eagle, high above himself in the light of the heavens... and the bliss which was tickling through his veins made him laugh from the depth of his heart. This was the end of his dream.

Early the next morning when Aryanand awoke, the images of his dream were still vivid, and he knew what they meant. Now he understood the peculiar display of the 'shadow-jumper': it was only a test which, however, contained a secret he would not be able to unlock with just reason. Somehow he had to reach the source of that light, which shone so brightly from within the eyes of the eagle that everything outside, himself included, would be left behind like a shadow.

All he had experienced so far seemed like images out of a dream, unreal and sprung from his own imagination. So many strange encounters which at first had defied explanation he had already gone through, but they had all dissolved like clouds in the wind.

So, Aryanand was confident he would successfully master this latest test too. He had already resolved not to be foolish and follow the dwarf over the edge of the cliff. Happy with his decision, Aryanand closed his eyes and enjoyed being alone and alive.

Effortlessly, almost of its own accord, his mind initiated the secret art he had been taught by his master and just as in his dream of the golden eagle, he found himself rising above himself, high up into a brilliant light. Weightless and without any effort, it felt as if he was falling upward!

In his surprise he opened his eyes and was dazzled: He was still sitting at the very same spot he had been sitting before. But how the bleak and barren mountain had changed!

What had been naked rock before, now was of the purest gold, and the world's most beautiful golden palace rose before his wondering eyes.

Golden creepers with blossoms of jewels grew around the magnificent columns, and crystal flowers with leaves of gold decorated the sweeping stairway which led to the gate.

Everything was filled with such dazzling light that Aryanand could not make out the faintest shadow anywhere.

Disbelieving what he saw, he wanted to rub his eyes, when, with a beautiful rolling sound the golden gates of the palace swung open.

Down the stairs came the 'shadow-jumper'. But he too had changed! He was still wearing the same blue vest he had been wearing before, but now it shone like the blue inside the light of a candle flame.

His demeanour had changed altogether: Instead of jumping and somersaulting, he descended the steps with an air of natural dignity, Aryanand had not noticed before.

He was reminded of a small flame, which in a windless place does not flicker.

"Take a look around," he invited Aryanand with a generous gesture. "All

you see here is yours! Your 'jump' has really been worth it! Everything is at your disposal! Your precious box too, you may keep. You certainly have earned it!"

This made Aryanand remember his casket. He looked for it and was startled again: Before it had been of shiny gold – now it was made of the purest diamond! But whichever way he turned it, he had no idea how it would open.

As he was still turning it in his hands to look for a hidden lock, the luminous dwarf continued to speak:

"This casket of diamonds and all you can see here, was here before just as much as it is now. It was only veiled from your view. But because you successfully passed my test, this treasure has been revealed. It is yours! No one will dispute it!"

Then he took Aryanand by his hand, to show him his new possessions.

But there was only one thing on Aryanand's mind: wherever the dwarf led him, he only searched for the Crown of Life.

A few hours later, the tour through the golden palace, through countless rooms filled with treasures, through a beautiful park with golden trees glistening with precious stones, walkways and waterfalls of gold and countless other artefacts of gemstones and gold eventually came to an end. Nowhere, however, had he seen the crown.

Aryanand, who had been walking in quiet wonder beside his guide, decided to finally ask him.

"Crown of Life?" The fellow's voice displayed surprise.

"Who on earth told you such nonsense? There is no such thing as a Crown of Life! It just exists as a peculiar idea in the heads of some old and forgotten hermits, who, living in deep, dark forests don't even know how to enjoy what life has to offer!"

"Why are you looking for some crown, which has never existed? Here, take what you have, take as much as you can! This will make you happy and rich!"

Meanwhile, the night had fallen with its thousand glittering stars. But the golden treasures sparkled in unfading glory.

"Look here, your chest of diamonds alone is worth more than a king's ransom!" The radiant goblin kept on nagging.

"No one will have anything more precious when you present it at home. Even your master will be proud of you when he sees you return with this treasure!"

With these and many other flattering words, the little fellow tried to persuade him to take the gold and just forget about everything else.

Aryanand though had already made up his mind. Could not everything he saw here dissolve before his very eyes the same way it had appeared? So he addressed his companion:

"For seven days I have climbed what is called the Mountain of Wisdom but not to strike a deal with you and exchange the Crown of Life for just gold! Even if you had collected all the treasures of the world they will not blind me! For without the light of the Crown of Life all this gold will lose its luster."

Firmly Aryanand explained to the dwarf that he was sure he would find the Crown of Life here on this mountain and not anywhere else, and that he had decided to once again return to his master and ask him more thoroughly, where it was hidden. The diamond casket he might as well leave with the other treasures, for compared to the Crown of Life it was as worthless as glass.

Then Aryanand lay down to rest, determined to leave this place in the morning.

At first it was just like a tiny flicker seen from very far away, like a silent glow behind his eyelids, which from somewhere inside filled him with ever increasing warmth and with light.

But how could that be? It should have been dark. All around him, Aryanand felt the quiet cool of the night.

However, this light was not simply just light, and the stillness was different from just being still. It permeated his entire being with tingling sparks of life.

Deeper and deeper he listened into this radiating stillness, which by now enveloped him inside and out. It was full of life, a bit like the whispering silence of falling snow; from somewhere it seems to originate and yet is everywhere at the same time.

It was just like that. For as Aryanand followed the silent sound of an ever so tender impulse of thought and submerged in the stillness of his soul, he found himself awake in an ocean. He was the source, the fountainhead, which at the same time is the ocean and the one eternal flow of a flood of silence. He was a tiny spark of happiness in an ocean of bliss, which across all time and space extends to the farthest horizons of cosmic life.

He was just himself... And yet he was everything...

And all that was just his innermost being which, reflecting itself in itself, in an eternal play with itself, brought forth the entire diversity of creation.

Uncountable worlds floated around him like a royal cloak made of sparkling stardust. Over bridges of stars, he strode across the highest heavens only to find himself already everywhere.

He was a wave, which knows that it is the unbounded ocean of life and dances through all of creation with laughter.

Only fullness remained!

The fullness of the eternal oneness of life and the fullness of the eternal multiplicity of creation were both but the fullness of his own, innermost Self.

He was the light of myriads of suns together–the light which fills any other light with light and life from inside; and its immeasurable glory shone about Aryanand's forehead like a crow made from bliss.

For one last fleeting moment he felt the whizzing of time touch his soul, then his breath stood still and his breath became the breath of eternity. For how long? Here and now, time did not exist. Eternity had become an instant and infinity a minute point.

However, when after some time, Aryanand found himself alone again and he knew with certainty that his search had ended. He had found within what he had looked for without and what had always been his: the Crown of Life – his very own Self!

It is beyond anything that is mortal and anything that can be lost. It is pure consciousness, eternally awake in itself and unperturbed bliss. It is the life in everything living, everywhere and at all times, forever.

Everyone can experience it as their own innermost Self and yet it is a secret greater than all secrets together, for it only reveals itself to itself.

Now Aryanand understood why wise men and women had always assured him, how simple it is to find the crown and that everyone can find it, although there is only one Crown of Life!

Overjoyed, Aryanand slowly opened his eyes.

At first he saw nothing – for the brilliance around him was surpassed by an even more dazzling light. Gradually, his eyes adjusted and he started to see: In front of him laid his diamond casket.

Its lid had sprung open and an indescribable flood of light pulsated from within the chest.

From the midst of this ocean of light emanated an even more blazing light; and there, where the brilliance was strongest, on a gold-embroidered cushion of light, lay an unspeakably radiant crown.

Beyond all doubt Aryanand knew: Here he had found his Crown of Life! For it radiated in the very same brilliance, which now illumined his innermost being.

Carefully he took the crown in his hands. It was crafted in the most delicate manner, cut from a single flawless diamond and with celestial skill, exquisitely set with all the gems of the world, as if set with the stars of all skies.

But the glory of perfection it emanated was beyond all words known on earth and in heaven.

Aryanand did not tire of turning it in his hands; and the light of the Crown of Life illumined the night brighter than the brightest sunshine.

In no time the night had passed, and when the first rays of the sun were heralding the dawn, Aryanand prepared for his descent.

Inside of him the light of fulfilment was resplendent, and even the sunlight dimmed before it. And although the treasures around him gleamed even brighter than the day before, Aryanand took only the crown, which he placed back carefully into the diamond-chest.

Seven days it had taken him to climb the Mountain of Wisdom. The same way back took him hardly an hour! What had been a rough and rocky trail, now turned into a safe, wide, flower-strewn path, as soon as Aryanand stepped on it. Sky-rising gorges which he had crossed on hair-raising swinging bridges were now transformed into lovely valleys.

Desolate places changed into light-flooded meadows as soon as Aryanand approached. Soft, springy moss and high blossoming trees grew where before had only been rock, and his path ran across a fragrant green carpet, winding in the shade of flowering branches.

On his way up he had crossed rushing streams over slippery boulders. Now, at the very same spots, he found natural bridges of rock, which sparkled in all possible colours and were permeated by glistening veins of silver and gold.

Aryanand felt his inner light leading the way in invisible rays, for wherever he turned his attention, things began to light up by themselves and seemed to smile at him even from a distance.

Wherever he went, nature seemed to be waiting for his arrival, only to lay all its splendor, all its magic and its power at his feet alone.

Deep within his heart, Aryanand felt he understood her all-encompassing language, and the little secrets birds exchanged in their flight, or leaves tenderly whispered into the wind, made him smile.

That very same day, Aryanand reached the forest hermitage of his master. He stepped out of the woods onto the clearing and from a distance he already saw the wise man cheerfully smiling at him.

Just as if in all these days he had never left his place or if Aryanand's adventures had taken no more than a second for him, he was still standing below the old tree, where they bade each other farewell. Jubilant and overflowing with happiness, Aryanand ran to meet his master and placed the Crown of Life at his feet. Then and there, he felt all the bliss of heaven and earth surge through his heart...

■■

Printed at Nutech Print Services-India, Faridabad

Werner Bandel (b. 1951; Wetzlar, Germany) studied photography at the School of Fine Arts in Kassel.

In 1970, he was introduced to Maharishi Mahesh Yogi's Transcendental Meditation (TM) and the actual unfoldment of his creative potential began with the regular practise of this simple mental technique. His interest gradually shifted from photography towards painting. 'Learning by doing' has always been his motto, and in the fields of painting and illustration, he is a self-taught artist.

Inspired by India's rich Vedic Literature, 'Aryanand and the Crown of Life' was conceived on Werner's first visit to India for a conference on Vedic Science and Modern Science, held in 1981 in New Delhi. The manuscript and sketches for the illustrations by the author were created during this conference. The final watercolours were completed during a second extensive stay in India.

Since then, Werner has travelled extensively all over the world, but on various occasions, always returning to India for festivals like Kumbh or yoga and meditation retreats. More recently, three consecutive pilgrimages to Mt. Kailash in Tibet have deepened his inner spiritual journey.

It comes as no surprise that he finds inspiration for all his creative work in the depth of his innermost consciousness. This is also where the magic key to the mysteries of this book lies hidden, waiting to be discovered by every reader afresh for him or her self.

"Aryanand felt the story the sage had told had been all too short. Like in a pleasant dream, time had passed far too fast but when he slowly opened his eyes, he was amazed to find the silver shield of the moon already afloat in a star studded sky."

– An excerpt from the book

"This beautiful tale of Aryanand is filled with the most profound wisdom on earth. No matter what your age, it will uplift your soul."

– William Sands, Vedic Scholar, Professor of Maharishi Vedic Science at MIU, USA

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ISBN 9354916023
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